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DEPT PASS USTR FOR KARESH, ROSENBERG, CELICO, STRATFORD, BLISS
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SUBJECT: ILO SEEKS DONOR FUNDING FOR CHINA MINE SAFETY
PROJECT

¶1. Summary: The International Labor Organization (ILO) and China's State Administration for Work Safety (SAWS) seek US\$1.9 million in funding for a three year project on improving occupational safety and health in China's coal mines. The project would use a tripartite approach to review mine safety laws, regulations and practices, provide training and disseminate best practices throughout the mining industry. Embassy will provide Washington agencies a complete project proposal and proposed budget electronically. End summary.

¶2. On April 3, the ILO office in Beijing and SAWS held a "donors meeting" at which they announced that they are seeking funding for a new project to improve occupational safety and health in China's coal mines. The ILO circulated a detailed draft project proposal and took questions from potential donors. (Embassy will circulate this proposal and a detailed proposed budget to Washington agencies electronically.)

¶3. The ILO said the draft project document is the result of two and one half years of consultations with SAWS and Chinese employer and worker organizations. The project, originally proposed by the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), aims to build a tripartite mechanism in China for mine safety risk assessment and risk management. Participants in the tripartite program would include SAWS, the ILO, the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) and its constituent organizations, and the Chinese Employers Confederation (CEC.) The ILO, the ICEM and the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM--an ILO-affiliated employers organization) would provide technical assistance and other in-kind support. Program activities would consist primarily of training for employers, government officials, mine inspectors and workers. Key outputs include:

--mine safety laws and regulations are reviewed, harmonized, widely disseminated and understood at all levels of the coal mining industry,

--capacity for risk assessment and risk management verified throughout the industry,

--improved safety and health conditions for coal mine workers (initially at pilot mines, ultimately at all mines),

--establishment of a mine safety inspection/supervision system that will ensure the competence, authority and independence of

those concerned to enforce mine safety regulations and promote workplace safety and health within a risk assessment framework,

--workplace safety supervisors are recruited and trained and have the means and authority to carry out their duties on behalf of mineworkers.

¶4. A representative from the German Embassy noted that corruption seems to be the root cause of mine accidents and ineffective mine safety supervision in China, and asked how the project would address this problem. The ILO responded that although SAWS has identified corruption as a contributing factor to mine accidents, the government has other means of addressing this problem. Meanwhile, the ILO representative said, empirical evidence shows that programs focused entirely on training, like the one being proposed, can significantly reduce the number of mine accidents and fatalities.

¶5. Laboff noted that two thirds of mine fatalities in China occur in small, privately operated mines where the ACFTU is rarely present, and asked how the project would reach these workers. ILO representatives said the project was designed to work with larger mines, in order to reach the largest share of the industry in the shortest possible time, and noted that there are also a significant number of accidents in these large mines. Small mines would benefit from lessons learned through this project as they are propagated throughout the mining sector by the tripartite partners. ACFTU representatives said they have a strong presence in large mines, but acknowledged that they had difficulty organizing workers in small mines. However, ACFTU representatives said that the ACFTU can still provide training to non-members through regional union organizations, and that hopefully this would help with organizing as well.

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